



Students stand up to 'Challenge'

By Marda Johnson/The Lebanon Reporter

— Jason Williams was disappointed when he learned that transportation issues were going to prevent Western Boone Junior-Senior High School from taking a team to an annual engineering competition, Tech TREK, earlier this year.

So when he heard about a regional construction challenge, he took the initiative to pull together a team and tell the school's technology teacher they wanted to compete in January.

The construction challenge team comprises juniors and seniors, and all but one of the students plan to go to Purdue to study engineering after graduation. Williams, Lucas Dull, and John Padgett are seniors; Adam Hayden and Jon Neese are juniors.

Dull, Padgett, Hayden and Neese are the future engineers.

And Williams?

He wants to be a chef.

Do culinary arts and engineering have something in common?

"They don't," Williams said, laughing.

But Williams can only go so far with his culinary aspirations at the high school level. And in the meantime, he's found Don Gray's technology classes entertaining.

"Mr. Gray's classes have always been my favorite," he said. "They've always been fun for me."

Building a team

When Western Boone Teacher Don Gray received a packet about the Regional Construction Challenge in October, he thought the students would be too busy with winter sports, band and the holidays to put together a team. But Gray said Williams took the packet and said he wanted to see if he could find other students willing to make the commitment.

"Over the years we usually go to Tech TREK," Williams said. "We didn't do that this year because we couldn't get a bus. I was kind of missing that, which is why I wanted to do (the construction challenge)."

Williams learned that the team would have to be ready to compete in three areas: a debate on an issue related to roads, bridges or water supply; a "road warrior" structure-building exercise, and a communications/marketing exercise.

The five young men divided the categories and began to prepare for the regional competition.

What they didn't know in the beginning was if they did well enough in regional competition, they would win an all-expense-paid trip to Las Vegas for the finals.

The competition

The team, accompanied by Gray, left at 5 a.m. Jan. 12 for the regional competition in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Once they arrived the students had a brief orientation meeting, and then got right into the projects.

The Western Boone team was slated for the first debate, and when the topic of deteriorating sewer systems was selected, Gray said he didn't know what to expect.

"Then Adam (Hayden) started quoting some facts, dates, and ideas for addressing problems," Gray said.

"And I'm just sitting there with my mouth hanging open."

The team moved on to the "road warrior" challenge where they were required to build a model bridge that would support a model vehicle. They had 35 minutes and a limited budget from which to buy supplies.

"The whole time I couldn't say a word, except, 'good job,'" Gray said.

Williams said the challenge was difficult.

"We got the bridge out there, but it didn't work as well as we'd hoped," he said.

They secured it as well as they could with glue and tape as time ran out.

"Eventually the bridge turned into a big ramp, but we did it (supported the vehicle) successfully," he said.

In the last challenge, which involved communications and marketing, the team decided to create a game that would promote the construction industry to school-aged students.

"We had cool game pieces like a hard hat and a wrecking ball," Williams said.

They came up with rules for the game, and designed the box, too.

As time ran out, Williams said he realized that he'd put the design on the box upside down, but otherwise they were happy with the results of the game.

The results

At the end of the day, 35 teams gathered for the awards ceremony. By this time the Western Boone students knew that 12 teams would advance from the regional competition to the international competition, to be held during a major construction trade show in Las Vegas.

The announcements began.

"We were sitting there, and they were getting down to the end of the list," Williams said.

Then came the announcement of the 10th team to advance.

Western Boone.

"Instantly we all jumped up," Williams said. "I almost knocked everyone over."

The team members had a long ride home, but they were so excited about the international competition that they broke open the rules packet and started making plans before they even made it back to Boone County.

Next stop vegas

The Western Boone construction team's five members and coach Gray will depart for Las Vegas March 10 and will stay through March 14. The time will be filled with not only competition against 49 other teams, but also with activities with their sponsor, JLG Industries, a company that designs and manufactures access equipment like boom lifts, scissor lifts and aerial work platforms.

"The networking there is going to be great for them," Gray said.

Williams said the team members are all studying hard for the upcoming competitions. An even though Mr. Gray will have the same restrictions on helping them at the Las Vegas challenge, Williams said their teacher is an important part of the success.

"He's done a lot to teach us over the years and we've learned quite a bit from him," Williams said.

Gray is proud of the team, and said he is confident they will do well in Las Vegas.

"I don't think I could have asked for a five better kids to take," Gray said. "This has been a great experience."

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Photos



Members of the Western Boone Construction Challenge team are (front, from left) Lucas Dull, Adam Hayden, Jon Neese and (back, from left) John Padgett and Jason Williams.